

LESSON 8

FIGHTING THE GROUND COMBAT ELEMENT

In war the power to use two fists is an inestimable asset. To feint with one fist and strike with the other yields an advantage, but a still greater advantage lies in being able to interchange them--to convert the feint into the real blow if the opponent uncovers himself.

-- B. H. Liddell Hart

Introduction

Purpose	This lesson provides you with the foundation on the structure, capabilities, and doctrinal concept of the employment of the Ground Combat Element (GCE) of the MAGTF.
Why Study the GCE?	The GCE is a potent, flexible organization structured to respond to the full dimension of crises and conflicts. The GCE is one of the MAGTF commander's fists (as is the ACE); you can use both of them as you would in a boxing match). You can use the GCE to exploit the principles of maneuver and firepower in the conduct of ground combat operations. Given the expanse of options available to MAGTF and joint planners, it is imperative that you develop an understanding of what the GCE brings to the fight.
Relationship to Other Instruction	MAGTF and joint operations planning requires a thorough understanding of GCE capabilities, limitations, and possible task organizations. Optimum leveraging of MAGTF combat power in conjunction with the tenets of maneuver warfare is possible only when you are aware of and appreciate what the GCE can and cannot do in the joint fight. This lesson supports <i>Marine Corps Planning Process</i> (8805), <i>MAGTF Operations</i> (8807), and <i>Amphibious Operations</i> (8808).
Study Time	This lesson, including the issues for consideration, will require about 5 hours of study.

Educational Objectives

Role and Employment Considerations	Explain the role and employment considerations of the GCE within the MAGTF.
Essential Concepts	Explain the essential concepts that influence the formation of a task-organized GCE.
Capabilities and Limitations	Evaluate the specific considerations (capabilities and limitations) and issues that must be addressed to capitalize on the warfighting capabilities of the GCE. [JPME 1(a)]
Joint and Multinational Operations	Know how the GCE fits in a joint and multinational operation.
JPME Areas/ Objectives/Hours (accounting data)	1/a/1.5

Discussion

Definition of GCE

FMFRP 2-12 defines GCE as...*The MAGTF element that is task-organized to conduct ground combat operations. GCEs are constructed around an infantry unit that vary in size from platoons or companies of 40 to 200 Marines to one or more divisions of approximately 20,000 Marines. GCEs also include appropriate combat support and combat service support units. Normally, there is only one GCE in a MAGTF.*

Elements of GCE

The GCE in a MEF is comprised of one or more Marine divisions. Each division or GCE contains

- Division headquarters
 - Tank battalion
 - Infantry regiment
 - Reconnaissance company
 - Infantry battalion
 - Artillery regiment
 - Artillery battalion
 - Headquarters battalion
 - Headquarters company
 - Service company
 - Truck company
 - Division headquarters
 - Military police company
 - Communications company
 - Assault amphibian battalion
 - Combat engineer battalion
 - Light armored reconnaissance battalion
-

Continued on next page

Discussion, Continued

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| GCE Missions | <p>GCE MEF missions include the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Commitment as a component of an advance MAGTF• Commitment as a follow-on rein for an MAGTF• Execute scheme of maneuver ashore in amphibious operations• Execute ground operations in support of maritime campaign as a component of an MAGTF• Conduct counterinsurgency, terrorism counteraction, peacekeeping, and peacetime contingency operations• Conduct humanitarian assistance/disaster relief operations• Protection/evacuation of noncombatants or installations |
|---------------------|--|

Roles of GCE	<p>As a rule, the GCE is task-organized around combat and combat service units. It can range in capability and size from a single reinforced rifle company to one or more Marine divisions. In a joint or multinational environment, the GCE can be further expanded to include U.S. Army or coalition forces.</p>
---------------------	--

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Capabilities of the GCE | <p>Capabilities of the GCE are listed below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Extraordinarily flexible• Employable in virtually all climates and places• Enjoys combat power from numerous sources• Sustains itself for a finite period, if properly task-organized |
|--------------------------------|---|
-

Continued on next page

Discussion, Continued

Limitations of the GCE

Some limitations of the GCE are listed below:

- Lack of organic mobility assets. The total Assault Amphibious Vehicle (AAV) and motor transport assets of the Marine division will "lift" almost one third of the assigned infantry units. This fact dictates external (CSSE or ACE) lift support.
- Lack of organic combat power when compared to Army units, specifically in the areas of armor and artillery. To compensate for this fact, the GCE is heavily dependent upon the ACE's ability to provide timely and effective close air support.
- The "operational reach" of the GCE is also limited by its shallow organic logistics infrastructure. It requires significant support from the CSSE for sustainment in prolonged operations conducted over distances greater than 75 miles.

Relationship Between GCE and Other MAGTF Elements

The GCE is an equal partner in the MAGTF, along with the ACE and the CSSE. The MAGTF, as a whole, is now recognized as the "warfighter" with each of its subordinate element's capabilities synchronized under the concept of the single battle. An interdependence between the three subordinate elements is recognized to maximize the capabilities and minimize the inherent limitations of each.

The **key to success** is for each element of the force to learn and practice exploiting the capabilities of the other elements and to minimize the limitations.

Continued on next page

Discussion, Continued

GCE Employment

The Marine GCE operates as an integral component of the MAGTF. It does not operate independently, but receives its mission from the MAGTF commander. The GCE is employed as

- Task-oriented (primary focus): The defeat of the enemy by application of superior military power at decisive places and times.
- Combat power: The GCE is capable of maneuvering to advantage and applying in combination direct and indirect fires against the enemy.
- Task-organized (mission-oriented): The grouping of all tactical, administrative, and service elements as a result of mission analysis, assignment of tasks, and construction of the organization to accomplish a specific task.

All of these together comprise a synergism of combined arms which can be explained as the combat arms of the GCE executes maneuvers while Synchronizing combat arms in time, space, and purpose to apply the necessary combat power at the decisive point and time.

Roles of the GCE in Joint and Multinational Operations

As a matter of policy, the Marine Corps' mission for the MAGTF is to be employed as a team and fight as the air-ground task force that it is. To pull one of the major subordinate elements from the MAGTF would significantly degrade the combat power of the force as a whole while putting the remaining elements at significant risk. That is not to say that subordinate elements of the GCE cannot be pulled to support other components of the joint or multinational task force. Dependent upon the Joint Task Force (JTF) mission and forces assigned, this action may prove prudent.

For example, during Operation *Desert Storm*, I MEF had an Army armor brigade and MLRS assets attached to it while it gave up LAR assets to support VII Corps. As a general rule, you can expect to see the entire MAGTF as a single unit assigned to a specific component of a JTF.

Continued on next page

Discussion, Continued

Additional Responsibilities

In the case where the MAGTF commander (CG, II MEF for example) is assigned as the commander of a JTF, it is possible that the GCE could be given the additional responsibility of Joint Force Land Component Commander. In this case, the GCE could have Army and/or multinational ground forces assigned under operational or tactical control.

Required Readings

***FMFM
Readings***

FMFM 6, *Ground Combat Operations*, pp. 1-1 to 2-11. Find this reading in the *FMFM Readings* (8800), pp. 329 to 359. These pages provide the doctrinal foundation for the expanded role of the GCE when employed in MAGTF operations. This manual provides connectivity between the philosophy of employing the MAGTF and the tactics, techniques, and procedures disseminated by the subordinate 6-series manuals.

***The Marine Air-
Ground
Task Force
(MAGTF)
Readings***

Edson, J.J. (Col., USMC [Ret]). "A Perspective on Desert Storm." *Marine Corps Gazette*, June 1991, pp. 25 to 27. Find this reading in the *The Marine Air-Ground Task Force (MAGTF) Readings*, Annex E, pp. E-3 to E-5. This article deals with the aspects of firepower and balance capabilities as they relate to the effectiveness of combined arms teams of the Marine Air-Ground Task Force. The author stresses the realization that only balanced forces can survive on modern battlefields and the importance of the preservation of capabilities that enable forces to be useful across the full spectrum of threats that confront a nation. Colonel Edson pointed out that ensuring FMFM 1, *Warfighting* is current should be a matter of top priority.

For Further Study

References

The following references are **not** required. These references were used to address the topics presented in the lesson. They are included for your review as needed.

- Joint Pub 0-2, *Unified Action Armed Forces (UNAAF)*.
 - FMFM 6-1/MCWP 3-11.1, *The Marine Division*.
 - FM 90-31/MCWP 3-3.8, *Army and Marine Corps Integration in Joint Operations*.
 - FMFRP 1-11/MCRP 5-2D, *Fleet Marine Force Organization*.
-

Issues For Consideration

Employment	How is the GCE used in the MAGTF?
Relationship	What is the relationship between the GCE and the other elements of the MAGTF?
Formation	What concepts influence the formation of a task-organized GCE?
Limitations	What are the major limitations of the GCE?
Roles	What are the possible roles of the GCE in joint and multinational operations?